CORRECT LINE COOKING

Waisted Dreams

Do you remember the beauty of showbags? You know, those bags full of goodies sold at the Non-Republican Melbourne Show and, I assume, other such festivals around the land. Among the ancient Freddos and the chocolates of a colour never seen elsewhere but in showbags, there would be little plastic items designed to amuse for 20 minutes before they broke; miniature tea sets, magic tricks, frisbee imitations, that sort of thing.

The major wonder of supermarkets these days is that someone seems to have taken the showbags of my childhood and shaken them out over the shelves. Have you looked over the little extras which sit in front of the real merchandise recently? The quality of the goods and their usefulness is astonishing.

My last trip to a supermarket revealed a plethora of wonders. Firstly, there were diet fridge magnets featuring a picture of a woman in a leotard reaching to open a refrigerator. A diet fridge magnet decorates the fridge with the slogan "STOP. THINK OF YOUR WAIST" printed on it, just like the genuine fridge magnet. Another one states "NO EATING" with a knife and fork slashed out in the fashion of Ghostbusters. My trolley was instantly filled with six packets of diet fridge magnets which took up the space I would otherwise have filled with unnecessary food. I already own a 'frig pig' which is a light operated toy which sits inside the refrigerator and honks when the door is opened. Using it in conjunction with the magnets, I should soon be absolutely wraithlike.

Once one starts examining these items it's hard to stop. Suction soap holders soon joined the magnets. These hold the soap and stick to the basin thus eliminating the unsightly and potentially dangerous problem of ordinary soap holders slipping around like banana skins in a Marx Brothers film. I was looking for flour but instead came away with a packet of special party candles, presumably designed for kids' parties, which are intended to resemble various cute animals allegedly loved by the younger folk. The only problem is that they are too small to look like anything but badly formed lumps of wax. Perhaps the fabled innocence of childhood will metamorphose them into fun pets, but somehow I doubt it.

My personal favourite gadget on display was the pack of bag sealers "By Insights". Designed to keep plastic bags from coming apart, the pack informed me that "each sealer has an integral write-on/wipe-off date and identification tab (Use any water-based fibre tip pen)." The picture shows a plastic bag full of peas, with the word 'peas' written on the sealer which holds it together so that the householder could recall what was in the see-through bag if he or she forgot what the little round green things are.

One of the major worries in a good bourgeois life is how to eat sweet corn. Corn skewers are the answer if you forget what the little round green things are. Problems with lipstick and butter combining remain unsolved as yet, but no doubt a gadget will eventually be invented to deal with this. Plastic lip covers, perhaps.

The future of manufacturing can be read on these packages. All of them are manufactured in Asia, primarily in China, but also in Hong Kong and Taiwan where nimble, underpaid fingers create the novelties for wages which would barely buy a single 'Collapsible Drinking Cup with Built In Pill Box', a fun item that retails for $1.00. What, I wonder, do the workers who make these things think of us, the consumers of Decoration Picks and Ice Balls? The latter's pack states that "This ice balls keep the drink cool" (sic) and the packet contains slices of plastic in the shape of lemon and orange segments. The Decorator Picks are to stick in food or, I presume, on fruit decorating cocktails, and feature paper giant pandas, peacocks and pineapples. The package shows a pineapple stuck in a hamburger.

Is this the heaven dreamed of by Chinese workers? Festooned hamburgers, hair swinging in ponytails, hands clasping an iced-beer cocktail? Corn skewered by the barbecue, and diet fridge magnets to remind them to go easy on the butter? Party loot bags (ten for a dollar) for the kids, which portray a clown lifting his hat over the slogan "This bag belongs to .......? This bag seems to belong to us all in Australia, where we are free to buy Suncatchers Stained Glass Look Window Decorations with thermometer, which portray Nordic cottages complete with snow on roofs (made in Taiwan) and shoe dips, bows decorated with rhinestones, for our feet as we waltz down the aisles of Woolworths, the Kings and Queens of our world, our trolleys filled with wonder, or at least with shiny and appetite suppressant magnets to decorate the overburdened fridge.

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